ADDRESS TO THE STUDENTS

OF

MANCHESTER NEW COLLEGE,

LONDON,

DELIVERED AFTER THE ANNUAL EXAMINATION, ON JUNE 23RD, 1869,

BY

REV. WILLIAM GASKELL, M.A.,

ONE OF THE VISITORS.

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This Address, obliged to be written hastily in sickness as well as in sorrow, is printed solely in compliance with a request made by the Trustees of the College at their Annual Meeting in London.

ADDRESS.

The feeling which at this moment is uppermost in my own mind must, I know, be uppermost also in yours. We meet under the shadow of two great losses. It could not, as you will easily suppose, be otherwise than a shock and a grief to me, on my first entrance into this Hall this morning, to be met by the announcement of the sudden death of one who was among my fellow-students both at Glasgow and at York, and with whom I have in a variety of ways been closely connected ever since. This is not the place to refer to the many services which Mr. Aspland rendered to our churches, and to the Association for promoting religious truth and freedom which he did so much to bring into vigorous and efficient working; but I cannot allow the opportunity to pass without bearing my testimony to the time and thought which he gave to the management of this Institution so long as he resided in the neighbourhood of Manchester, the care and fidelity with which he filled the office of Secretary during a period of considerable anxiety, and the remarkable business talents which he brought to the arrangement and settlement of many difficult and complicated details.

We miss too from amongst us one who was connected with the College through well-nigh fifty years, and for a long time presided over it with distinguished ability, usefulness, and honour. In losing him I have lost one of my best and oldest friends. In conjunction with my former beloved colleague, Mr. Robberds, he examined me when I sought entrance into the Institution at York, welcomed me with kind and encouraging words when I was called to settle in Manchester, was always ready with wise counsel and hearty sympathy while we laboured together there, during an intimacy of forty years no difference of feeling ever divided us, and to renew my intercourse with him at these Examinations was that which, most of all, made me look forward to them with pleasure. His removal, therefore, it need scarcely be said, has made this an occasion of deep sadness to me; and the thought which would keep rising within me, while sitting here where I used to have him at my side, has been,

> "But Oh! for the touch of a vanished hand,
> And the sound of a voice that is still!"

And you whose privilege it has been to come under the influence of his sweet and affectionate nature, and to profit by his extensive knowledge, and refined taste, and varied acquirements—who remember the earnestness with which he sought your improvement, and the kindness with which he gave you his advice—cannot but feel a mournful regret that you will benefit by these no more.

With sad truth indeed may we say, a standard-bearer in our little host has fallen; and as yet I see not where the one is to be found able to bear up the banner which he so honourably bore. But ours is no creed of despair. A noble cause demands our efforts. We believe that right is might, and that truth must prevail. As leaders drop in our ranks, they leave a weightier charge and a heavier responsibility to us; but, if we choose, this may be turned into greater glory. We may not shrink from the battle, nor withdraw disheartened from the cause to which we are vowed. Rather must we stand more bravely by it, and redouble our efforts on its behalf, filling to the best of our power the place which God assigns to us, till the time comes for us too to lay down our arms, and enter into our rest. He who gave, and for some wise reason has taken away, the friend so widely revered, will, we may trust, put His spirit upon some other, and make him equal to the high and holy work which that friend has been called to relinquish.

To all of us "he being dead yet speaketh." In his pure and saintly life, in his calm faith and holy trust, in his winning gentleness and ready sympathy, in his unswerving fidelity to principle and steadfast devotion to truth, and his deep interest in all that makes for human good, he has given to every one of us an example which we cannot contemplate without profit, and which we shall do well to follow. But to you, my young friends, the last of a long line of students that have enjoyed the advantage of his instruction—in

whose ears his words still linger, and who will remember throughout your lives that his dying lessons were received by you—there are several points in his character which seem to me to speak in a special manner; and while his memory is still fresh among you, I would direct your attention to one or two of these.

To those of you who came immediately under Mr. Tayler's instruction, I need not say how exact was his scholarship, how various were his acquirements, how refined and cultivated was his taste. Now, nothing like the same measure of these would have been attained, but for the careful training which he received in his youth, and so faithfully turned to account. He had his vocation clearly before him, and knowing that excellence could not be achieved without effort, he gave himself diligently and conscientiously to the studies that were to prepare him for it. The foundation was then firmly and securely laid on which to raise the acquisitions that were afterwards the sources of so much satisfaction to himself, and so much benefit to others. This was shewn by his being chosen, immediately on the conclusion of his University course, to supply the place in the College at York of our most finished scholar, during his absence for a session in Germany, and amply did he justify the choice. The accuracy of his knowledge, the breadth of his culture, and the clearness with which religious ideas existed in his consciousness were such that when he was called to take charge of a congregation which

made more than ordinary demands of an intellectual kind on its minister, he proved well able to meet them, and young as he still was "no man could despise his youth." It was this improvement, too, of his student-days—the discipline to which he then submitted himself, and the mental habits which he then formed—that enabled him, without neglecting the duties of his office, to go on steadily adding to his stores of learning; thus that he qualified himself to exert an influence beyond the limits of his own people, favourable to the growth of religious freedom and charity, such as he would not otherwise have done; thus that he was prepared to render important service, through the press and in other ways, to the cause of Christian truth; and thus that he became so thoroughly fitted for the office here which he so usefully and honourably filled, and which now alas! is left vacant. It was not by any extraordinary abilities that his success was won, but by a wise and diligent exercise of those which God had given him. He began well, and went on well, ever making much more.—To you who are still in your training-time, his example in this respect persuasively speaks. I will not now repeat any of the trite things that are said—not the less true because so trite—to shew how precious, how indescribably precious, that time is; but I would simply bid you reflect on what was the result of a right use of it in the case of him who is in all our thoughts. I will say nothing of the esteem which it brought him among those that were best qualified to judge of his

work, and the honoured name which it gave him throughout our household of faith, on both sides of the Atlantic; but I would ask you, not now alone but often in your days of study, to think with yourselves what a power for usefulness it conferred upon him as a preacher, and a writer, and preeminently in the sphere where you have been brought into intimacy with him, as a tutor engaged in preparing others for the service of the great Master. Think of this, and surely it cannot be without some effect in exciting you to a wise and faithful improvement of the period on which, of necessity, so much depends. Ah! believe me, you little know what a mighty difference the way in which it is spent may make in the whole of your future career. Earnest, and diligent, and laborious as you may be hereafter, nothing can make up for the neglect of this. You cannot tell what calls will be made upon you when you enter fully into your work—how much you will feel the need of all the power which mental vigour, and width of knowledge, and largeness of thought confer, when you come to fight hand to hand with philosophic scepticism, and stubborn infidelity, and low-thoughted worldliness, and scoffing sin; and you can but faintly imagine with what sadness you may then look back on the precious opportunities which are now yours, if you let them pass unimproved, and what pain there may be in the thought how much less fitted you are to minister to them who trust to you for guidance in spiritual things, than you would have

been if those opportunities had been truly and conscientiously turned to account. If, then, you would spare yourselves the bitterness of such regret, and are desirous to make your mark in the world, and aspire to a share in influencing its destinies for good, set store upon the time which is still yours, and make diligent use of the advantages which are offered to you here. You will thus firmly plant the ladder by which you may rise to excellence. The mental habits of the pupil will be carried on into your future lives, and by careful thought and study you will be continually correcting, and clearing, and enlarging your views, and prove yourselves "workmen that need not to be ashamed."

Another point observable in the character of your late beloved Principal was the way in which his intellectual pursuits were all quickened and pervaded by a devout, religious spirit He beautifully blended the refinement of the scholar with the simple earnestness of the Christian minister. Keen as was his relish for the pleasures of literature, he never suffered them to withdraw him from his chosen calling, but made even his recreations subsidiary to it. In his various studies and inquiries, eagerly as he gave himself to them, he did not lose sight of the end which is to sanctify every earthly work, but remembered and honoured the apostolic precept, "Do all to the glory of God." It was this which gave such a fine unity of action to his conduct, and made it so telling. No one could be long in his presence without being

impressed by his deeply reverential spirit, or without feeling what a truly Christian interest he took in all the great causes of earth, and how warmly his heart beat to help on what he believed to be right and good. Without directly aiming to be religious in the common intercourses of society, he was so in a more than ordinary degree; and whatever the theme, whether politics, or business, or social doings, he unconsciously raised it by the simple religiousness of his nature into a higher region and a purer light than that of the world. It was this, too, combined with the qualities at which I have before glanced, that made his pulpit services so effective. Without any oratorical gifts, any dazzle of rhetoric, any declamatory power, there was a spiritual force in his teaching which went to the heart. It was because it came from the heart. In listening to him, you felt that he was not setting before you truths and principles which his intellect "did coldly furnish forth," but that he was supplying you with refreshing and invigorating streams from the deep fountains of his own inner life. It was this which made his work truly a sacred work, and enabled it to leave an impress, as I know it has done, on the souls of many for good.—In this respect, again, he is a pattern for you. As you begin to taste the keen pleasure of intellectual pursuits, and "the severe delights of truth enjoy," be mindful that the just balance is preserved between the mental and the spiritual; see that while cultivating the former you are not neglect-

ing the latter, but carefully feed and cherish it day by day, as the vivifying power which is to animate all that you do, and on which the real success of your future work must necessarily depend. Mr. Carlyle does but utter an obvious truth when he says, "he that will teach religion must have religion." You cannot communicate what you do not possess. A virtue cannot go out of you which is not in you. This, you will see, is a matter of primary importance, and one which you cannot lay too deeply to heart. While earnestly engaged in your appointed studies, let religion stand by and shed over them its blessing. Work as "ever in your great Taskmaster's eye." And bring all your gifts—your knowledge, your taste, your talents of every kind—as the wise men of old brought theirs, and lay them at the Saviour's feet.

There are various other points well deserving your regard in the character of the friend to whom our thoughts are turned on which I might dwell. There was, for instance, his perfect candour and openness of mind, united with the most simple, loyal-hearted fidelity to truth. He was ready to welcome light from whatever quarter it broke; and, like an eminent thinker, he might have said, "he believed as he went along." He had not the slightest fear that any discoveries would ever be made that would go to destroy the great foundations of religious faith. "Creeds," he felt, "may perish, opinions disappear, and the whole face of society undergo a complete revolution; but man and nature, and that Divine

will which created both cannot change, and the truth which is built on them must be eternal."* In this persuasion he ever acted; and with at least equal reason might he have used the Stoic emperor's words, Ζητῶ ἀλήθειαν ὑφ' ἧς οὐδείς πώποτε ἐβλάβη. But at the same time, while most free in his inquiries and faithful to his convictions, he had too much regard for truth to throw out heedlessly every crude idea and hasty conjecture just as they arose. This he rightly judged, was not treating it with becoming reverence; and he has more than once expressed to me his regret at the way in which some of a younger generation sent forth into the world, before they had had anything like sufficient time to mature them, their unripe fancies and half-formed opinions, of which they could scarcely fail to be one day ashamed. He wisely waited till his conclusions had been fully thought out and duly considered, and then propounded them in carefully chosen, well-weighed words. While, too, there was nothing like a timorous shrinking, through mistaken charity, from the open avowal of what he believed to be right, he was ever guided by the moderation of a truly Christian spirit. There are some who by their inconsiderate vehemence, or want of humility, or contemptuous tone, do harm to the cause which they are seeking to serve, and afford too

* Sermon on "The Perpetuity of the Christian Dispensation, viewed in its connection with the progress of Society."

much reason to doubt the heavenly derivation of the faith which takes so rude and ungentle a shape. This was never the case with him whom we mourn. His spirit, at once firm and resolute, yet tender and affectionate as that of a child, never caused the truth to be evil spoken of, but was a recommendation of it to all who came within the sphere of his influence.

Such are some of the points in his character, feebly and imperfectly brought out, which seem to me deserving of the special regard and imitation of those among you whose lives are to be devoted to work similar to that which mainly occupied his, and in which he laboured with so much honour and success. What has been wanting of force in my words, your affection for him will supply.

When, two years ago, I offered a few hints on some requisites for the successful prosecution of that work, my friend, as we walked home afterwards, in his own kind, generous way expressed his approval of the remarks which had been made, and led me to give a half-promise that when it next became my turn to deliver this annual Address, I would supplement them by others bearing upon the same subject; but I had not the heart to do it on the present occasion, and I must reserve what I might have said to some future one—if it should ever come. Meanwhile, take away with you one general exhortation from the life and character on which we have been dwelling, ere they fade away into that dim oblivion into which all that we have admired and

loved must pass—and that is, to maintain ever, as he did, a high conception of the nature of the work to which you have dedicated yourselves before God. Feel that earth has none nobler—can have none. Remember it is to be yours to furnish the lessons which instruct, the truths which dignify, and the hopes which ennoble humanity; yours to strengthen men for "the good fight of faith," and enable them to trample temptation and sin beneath their feet, and bear bravely up under all the ills which oppress them; yours to fill their souls with that pervading spirit of holiness which converts earth into a solemn temple, and life into one continued service to God; yours to make them victors over death, and prepare them for a bright inheritance in heaven. Keep such remembrances as these before you, and they can hardly fail to inspire the resolution to give yourselves wholly to your work, to pour your mind and heart and soul into it, and to acquire all attainable aptitudes and qualifications for the efficient performance of it. Set your aims high. You have the possibility of making life, instead of a humiliating record of wasted opportunities and misused talents and wretched failures, to be looked back upon with shame and confusion of face, one filled with duties faithfully done and trials patiently borne and Christian endeavours to serve and bless, that has been growing fairer and brighter to the last, and may come to a dying bed crowned with honours and circled with love, as he has come to whom our hearts now turn with

grateful affection, and whose praise is so justly in all our churches; O see that this possibility be not lost but wisely made the most of! There are biographies whose pages are broader and more enduring than any which are traced with pen and ink, and stereotyped by the press; there are lives written on the hearts of men, not much spoken of, it may be, nor ever reviewed, but with lines that are gone out to the uttermost parts of the earth, whose power is that of true and faithful action. Such power, as it was that of the friend of whom I have spoken, may, if you choose, be that of every one of you. And, at the same time, to each the encouraging thought is given,

"Fear not thy single soul
Shall sink to serve the whole;
Who more hath loved he also lives the more;
Each strain of generous strife
Lifts thee to fuller life;
Love lends thee wings and winds to gain the longed-for shore."

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